DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 354 CS 211 361

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TITLE Beyond the Four Theories of the Press.
PUB DATE May 88
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Asociation (38th, New Orleans, LA, May 29-June 2, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); Freedom of Information; Freedom of Speech; Intercultural Communication; Mass Media; *Mass Media Role; *News Media; *Power Structure; *Theories
IDENTIFIERS *Media Analysis; *Media Characteristics; Theoretical Orientation; Theory Development

ABSTRACT

An examination of the interrelated philosophical, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the four normative media theories (authoritarian, Soviet-communist, liberal, and social responsibility) in a societal context based on power relationships leads to four conclusions of a general nature. First, the media in one nation can have different ownership and control structures, as well as several philosophies regarding the function of the media. Second, individual media structures can be included in the above distinction. Third, this approach provides a more appropriate methodology to analyze normative views on communication at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Fourth, as power relationships are looked at in a multidirected and dialectic fashion, this approach does not limit itself to a top-down perspective only. This implies that participatory or user-oriented modes of communication can also be explained and analyzed from this perspective. The importance of including a societal context based on power relationships is illustrated in the different ways that the concepts "freedom of information" and "free flow of information" are interpreted in cultures throughout the world. An illustration of the participatory mode of communication and the freedom from the limitation of the top-down power relationship is the recent international effort to establish the right to communicate, the active and passive human right of the receiver to inform and be informed. (A 68-item bibliography is appended.) (RS)

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BEYOND THE FOUR THEORIES OF THE PRESS

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Paper to be presented at the seminar on
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ICA Conference, New Orleans, May 1988

CS211361

> "Freedom of opinion; freedom of expression; freedom of the press; freedom to communicate; this ascending progression of liberties gained by a people in the course of its national history may be indicative of what could be achieved internationally. The ambition here is not to substitute one freedom for another as some initially believed, but rather to crown the whole fabric of 'intellectual' freedoms with a new one that encompasses all the others".
>
> Jean d'Arcy (1983:XXVI)

Normative theories, policymaking and power relations

One often claims that policy, in the practice as in the theory, is based on a number of assumptions, usually provided and supported by social-scientific research. These serve as a guidance for policymakers of various social sectors to justify their policy. However, in reality, not only normative, but also and especially so, power factors play a role. Certainly when it comes to confirming and carrying out policy recommendations.

Contrary to traditional approaches of power factors which I consider static and top-down oriented, I would like to introduce a more dynamic and multiple approach on power relationships. This implies a more dialectic and multi-centered perception of power factors which also takes counter-power or empowerment into account.

Although most of the social scientists reckon that the power concept is essential for the understanding of the social reality, it is often not defined and therefore differently interpreted. This is mainly due to the multidimensionality of the concept of power.(For more details, see Servaes, 1988.)

The oldest interpretation of the power concept refers to a possession in a narrow as well as a broad meaning,that is a property or possession that is handled by actors in a mainly intentional direct or indirect manner. One can find such a static perception in different functionalistic as well as classic-marxist theories. In this context power is one-sidedly situated with the so-called 'powerholders'. Their position of power rests on a conflict relationship, that can only be 'resolved' by concensus on one side or by struggle on the other.

Critical social-philosophers and post-structuralists, such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens, or Jurgen Habermas, have been pointing out the limitations of such a power and ideology concept, and consequently explored new insights and approaches. The relationship between power and conflict is of an accidental nature, they argue. Herewith they go against Max Weber's much used power definition which describes power as the capability of one individual to impose his will, despite the objections of others. Nevertheless, they do not deny the fact that the exercise of power is an assymetrical phenomenon, but believe

that power is 'all embracing' and 'all mighty'. Power and conflict often go together, so they continue, but this is not because one logically implies the other, but because power has to be seen in cohesion with the pursuit of interest. While power is a characteristic of every form of human interaction, contrapositions of interests are not. Which means that power is a dual concept that can be interpreted in two ways. Looking at it in static ways there are those who have power and those that endure power. But interpreted in a dynamic way one could say that even the powerless exercise power over the powerful. In other words, to exercise power is not the same as suppression. Thus, Laeremans (1985:131) claims that "power concerns the possible effectuated and assymetrically divided ability of one actor (powerholder) to put into order, inside a specific interaction system, the alternatives of actions of one or more actors (power subjects). Power centres around the capability to regulate and structure the actions inside assymetrical relations" (my translation).

In general, one can in relation to the topic of power and interests distinguish between three problem areas: the mutual dependency between the macro-level of the society or the system and the micro-level of the social actions, the position and the opportunity of the subjects, and the relationship of domination, dependency and subordination of power and interest contrapositions. These problem areas are

central in the presentday social-scientific and social-psychological discussions and have yielded a variety of disciplines and interpretations.

Mass media and society

In communication sciences we usually refer to the book by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) for an interpretation of this issue. These authors started from the assumption that "the press always takes on the coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially it reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted" (Siebert, 1956:1-2). Referring to special political science models, they discern four normative press theories: the authoritarian, the Soviet-communist, the liberal and the social responsibility theory.

These four press (or better media) theories since then have regularly been discussed and modified (cfr. e.g. Al-Ahmed, 1987; Elliott, 1986; Gordon, 1987; Hachten, 1981; McQuail, 1983; Picard, 1987; Rivers, 1969; Smets, 1984; Sommerlad, 1966, or Wilcox, 1975).

Especially Lowenstein and Merrill's work (1974, 1977, 1979, 1981,1983, 1987) deserves to be mentioned explicitly in this context. Their thesis is that Siebert's classic models are based on, on the one hand, a too restricted (Western) description of concepts like freedom, democracy,

and so on, which do allow little or no generalisations; and that, on the other hand, reality often doesn't comply to the principles defined in philosophical terms.

Therefore Lowenstein and Merrill propose a double but integrated distinction with both an economic and a philosophical basis. The thesis, mentioned above, which was Siebert's starting point, was never questioned though. Because, as the former, these authors also think that "media systems are, of course, closely related to the kinds of governments in which they operate; they are, in essence, reflective and supportive of the governmental philosophy ... When viewed in this way, it is possible to say that all press systems are enslaved - tied to their respective governmental philosophies and forced to operate within certain national ideological parameters" (Merrill, 1979: 153).

But instead of the philosophical, they prefer a more economic approach, because "the source of support will, in almost every case, indicate important operational characteristics of the press" (Merrill, 1979: 164). Thus they implicitly accept the marxist thesis that the economic basis defines and determines the ideological and sociocultural superstructure (cf. Servaes, 1979).

Next they bring in a distinction on both the economic ('social' would have been a better term) and the philosophical base. Within the dominant ownership structures

they discern three forms: (a) private media (ownership by individuals or nongovernmental corporations; supported primarily by advertising or subscriptions); (b) media owned by different parties (ownership by competitive political parties; subsidized by party or party members); and (c) media owned by the government (owned by government or dominant govenment party; subsidized primarily by government funds or government-collected license fees).

This economic basis could be expanded threefold. First of all, not only the 'ownership structures' but also the direct and indirect control-mechanisms and structures should be taken into account. "No political or social system exists with a totally free flow of information. Control over information and ideas is inherent in the very nature of human society - the human desire to conform; the natural coloring of events by the observers' preconceptions; the necessary bureaucratic pressures and interests involved in journalistic work; the monopoly of bureaucrats over information; and the needs of politicians and officials to ensure their own legitimacy with and penetration of their societies. These forces limit and structure the content of the mass media everywhere far more than do laws and explicit practices of directing and censoring the mass media", conclude Curry & Dassin (1982:283) after an extensive survey of the press censoring and controlling mechanisms all over the world. Rowat (1981:315) in this context also points out how subtle this is often done: "Modern governments make a

genuine effort to inform the public about their administrative programmes and activities. As a result, the general public are not fully aware that much information is purposely withheld, or that the information released is slanted in favour of the government and its bureaucracy". Therefore it is too simplistic - as it often happens though - to judge the so-called democratic nature of a country by the presence or absence of direct censorship only. See e.g. the annual report by the Zurich based International Press Institute.

Secondly, ownership and control structures can be of a local, national, international or transnational nature.

And, thirdly, the splitting up into a private, public and mixed sector on the one hand, and a distinction between control and/or property structures within the production versus distribution sector on the other hand, seem to allow a more useful classification. The scheme elaborated by Mowlana (1976, 1977) could be used as a starting point. Al-Ahmed's (1987) analysis of the Saudi Arabian mass communication system provides an interesting case study in this respect.

Concerning the philosophical starting points of a certain press system Lowenstein and Merrill set out from a fivefold typology: (a) an authoritarian philosophy ("government licensing and censorship to stifle criticism and thereby maintain the ruling elite"); (b) a social-authoritarian philosophy ("a government and government-party

ownership to harness the press for national economic and philosophical goals"); (c) a liberal philosophy ("absence of governmental controls - except for minimal libel and obscenity laws - assuring a free marketplace of ideas and operation of the self-righting process") - (Merrill and Lowenstein prefer the concept 'libertarian' to the more customary 'liberal'. In American economic thinking the term 'libertarian' is associated to Smith, the term 'liberal' to Keynes. In European thinking, however, the former term has a rather 'anarchistic' connotation. Therefore I prefer to use the term 'liberal') - ; (d) a social-liberal philosophy ("minimal governmental controls to unclog channels of communication and assure the operational spirit of the libertarian philosophy"); and (e) a social-centralistic philosophy ("government or public ownership of the limited channels of communication to assure the operational spirit of the libertarian philosophy") (Merrill, 1979:164).

With Lowenstein and Merrill the authoritarian and the liberal model are given the same definition as in the original typology. The social-authoritarian model stands for the communist one, eventually to be completed with these developing countries with a central and authoritarian media policy.

Since the social responsibility model is rejected as being ambiguous (cfr. Merrill, 1983) it is split up into a social-liberal and a social-centralistic version. Both models are built on liberal ideas "but each recognizes that modern

society and modern technology have in some ways restricted the marketplace of ideas and that societal interference is necessary to unclog these choked channels" (Merrill, 1979:165). While the social-liberal model puts the responsibility for regulating and adopting the course of the system in the hands of the media systems themselves, in the social-centralistic model the external participation of public institutes or the government is not improbable. The fundamental difference between the social-centralistic and the social-authoritarian vision is that the first leaves from a multitude of opinions and communication channels competing with each other, whereas the authoritarian vision wants to subject the media to the established power.

Communication freedoms in cultural settings

Although, for the reality of policymaking this latter typology offers to me more possibilities than the classic but still accepted classification of 1956, I would like to introduce a third dimension which seems to me of a major importance to the above discussion, that is a more culturalistic-anthropological dimension. Let me illustrate this by briefly describing the way communication principles have been regarded in distinct cultural settings.(For more details, see Servaes, in press.)

The concepts 'freedom of information' and 'free flow of information' are of a relatively recent date. The ideas on

which they are based are very old though. In fact they go back to the old Western principles of 'freedom of opinion', 'freedom of expression' and 'freedom of the press'. For centuries already these principles are at the base of the Western way of thinking. They, among other things, were explicitly referred to in the American Constitution of 1776 and during the French Revolution. Article 12 of the American Bill of Rights states that "the freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty and can never be restrained but by despotic government". In 'Les Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen' of 1789 it is stated that "la libre communication des pensees et des opinions est un des droits les plus precieux de l'homme; tout citoyen peut donc parler, ecrire, imprimer librement, sauf a repondre de l'abus de cette liberte dans les cas determines par la loi" (Oestreich, 1963: 30-33). For an historic survey, see Attali (1976), Barendt (1985), or Smith (1981). Though having the same philosophical roots, both interpretations of freedom clearly differ. The French media are therefore, according to Eisendrath (1982), more affected by indirect controls on free expression which carry the promise of reward or the threat of punishment. This may impose a greater degree of pressure for self-censorship.

Though the freedom of word and expression have always been subject to fundamental restrictions, they nevertheless are part of the European and American ways of thinking, which led to a freedom of printing and to a free press.

However, the practical application of these liberties soon escaped the national level and the need for international agreements was felt. These shift can partly be explained as a result of changing power factors, partly also through culturally defined interpretation problems. For international agreements and declarations also the non-binding character of many of these agreements is a crucial factor. Ricoeur (1986:11) therefore states that "two shortcomings thus appear: that of law without force, as Pascal would have said, and that of law that is open to conflicting interpretations. The latter mainly concern the relation between asserting that economic, cultural and social rights are individual rights and asserting that these rights have their origins in the social policies of states. These two shortcomings are interrelated".

Of both shortcomings I will provide a number of examples. The problems arising with the interpretation of communication principles, the MacBride Report or the New International Information Order, are linked to powershifts on the political and/or economic level, as well as to the questioning of their universal validity. Wilcox (1975: 101) e.g. writes that "all too often, there is the tendency in the United States and Europe to think of Africa as a single, monolithic country, with an unstable, authoritarian government. In such a setting, press freedom is written off as an impossibility. Such superficial impressions of course

are far from the truth. The social, political and press institutions at work in every country are diverse as the geography and people's of Africa".

Besides, in most cultures, there is a difference between the rules of the written and unwritten culture (Hsiung, 1985; Taylor, 1986; Terwiel, 1984). While many (non-Western) governments, in their offical declarations and documents, underwrite the universal declarations issued by the United Nations, which for a number of historical reasons are mainly based on Western ideas, in reality they don't pay much attention to them. This is often due to reasons which have to do with power and culture. In Asia, for instance, a number of values and norms, which the West considers very important, like equality of men and women or democracy, are considered less important in reality. Other values, like respect for the elderly or loyalty to the group, on the other hand, are in the East considered much more important than in the West (further elaborated in Servaes, 1987b). This also counts for the interpretation of concepts like cultural and press freedom in, for example, the western versus communist world (see Goldfarb, 1982; McGee, 1987). Therefore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was in 1981 amplified with a Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights. The drafters argued that the United Nations' declaration is too much of a compromise between the liberal humanism and the marxist humanism (Sinaceur, 1986). Since

October 1986 also the African Charter of Human Rights has come into operation.

In the domain of the freedom of expression and the freedom of press, one can observe a double evolution in the post-war period. Whereas originally the active right of the so-called sender-communicator to supply information without externally imposed restrictions was mainly stressed; nowadays the passive as well as active right of the receiver to be informed and to inform gets more attention.

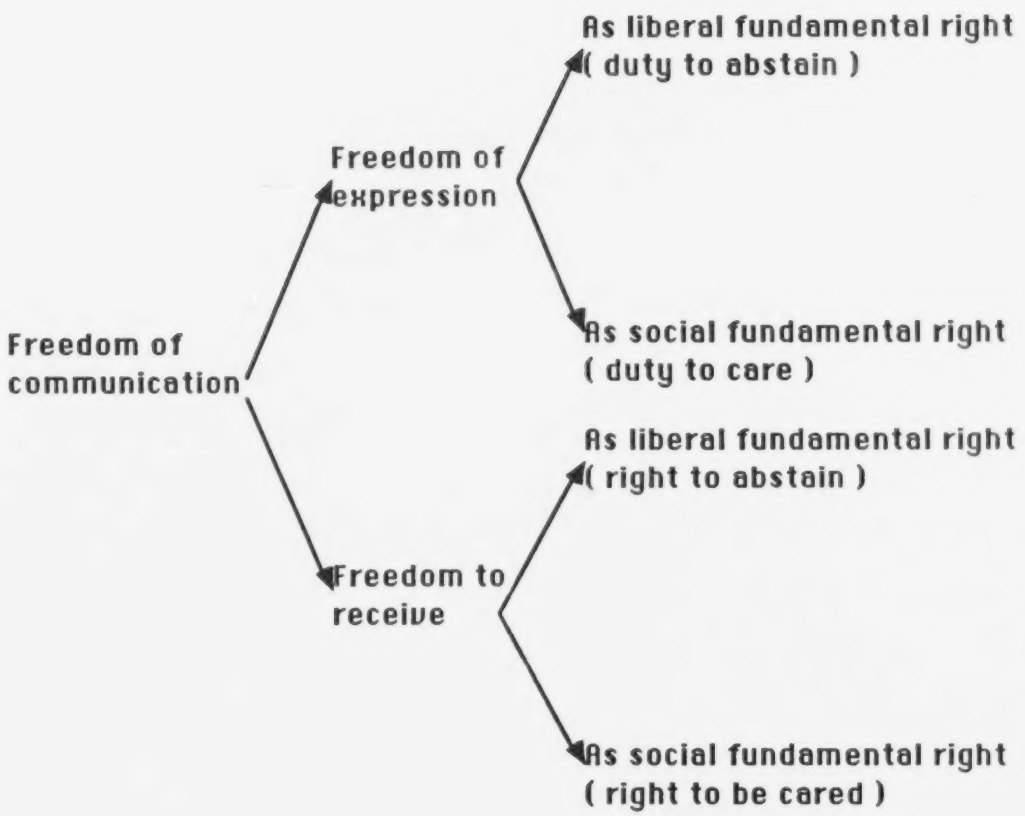
The right to communicate

Therefore the principle of the right to communicate was introduced because it contains both the passive and active right of the receiver to inform and be informed. This principle first appeared in 1969 in an article of Jean D'Arcy, the then director of the UN information bureau in New York. D'Arcy (1969:14) wrote that "the time will come when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will have to encompass a more extensive right than man's right to inform, first laid down twenty-one years ago in Article 19. This is the right of man to communicate". Only in 1974 this principle will make its entrance in the Unesco. Also MacBride (1981), who considers the principle of free expression as the most important human right, states that this freedom implies four specific rights: 'the right to

impart and publish news and information', 'the right to seek and to obtain information', and 'the right to be informed'. Wiio (1977), starting from the question of 'ownership' -- who owns the right to communicate? --, distinguishes between a so-called Society Owner Model and an Individual Owner Model. He argues that the right to communicate therefore implies 'individual rights' (e.g., the right to inform and to be informed, protection of privacy, freedom of movement, the right of assembly, freedom of opinion and expression, and access to sources of information), institutional rigths (such as the right to publish, access to sources of information, or the maintenance of professional secrecy), as well as rights of communities (e.g., the free and balanced flow of information, the preservation of cultural integrity, cultural exchange, or the rights of correction and reply). In these formulations both individual and social rights and duties are included. In reality however, depending on the interpretation and/or power position, most of the times only one of the above mentioned rights is considered essential. Therefore, this right of communication must be at the base of the search for a public or user oriented view on communication issues (see, among others, Degreef, 1980; Fischer, 1982, 1983; Harms, 1977; Jorgenson, 1981; and Richstad, 1977).

There is a second related shift to be noticed from the so-called passive maintenance duty of the government towards

the media, to the emphasis on the government's responsibility to actively take care of and to create the conditions and infrastructure in which the freedom of communication can be realised and stimulated as a fundamental social right. Voorhoof (1985:11) sums up both evolutions in the following scheme:


Freedom of communication
Freedom of expression
As liberal fundamental right (duty to abstain)
As social fundamental right (duty to care)
Freedom to receive
As liberal fundamental right (right to abstain)
As social fundamental right (right to be cared)

Both shifts on the definition of communication freedom principles and the role of the government can be briefly illustrated by the discussion on the concept for a New International Information Order (NIIO). As is the case in the above mentioned principles there is no clear unified definition of the NIIO concept: "There is no model for the new, more just order in the field of mass communication, no instructions to be followed, and there is no unified, valid definition of it either" (Bunzlova, 1986:23).

In other words it is a concept that covers different meanings (Dill, 1978; Pearce, 1983; Roach, 1986). Nevertheless, most authors who have tried to define the content of the NIIO concept (see e.g. Becker, 1986; Hamelink, 1980; IOJ, 1984; Nordenstreng, 1984; or Yadava, 1984) discern two fundamental fields of tension: on the one hand the tension between freedom and sovereignty, on the other hand the tension between private and government or public initiatives.

While the West emphasizes the individual liberal freedom of the private initiative, especially the group of Non-Aligned Countries claims the right of self-determination and the national sovereignty in a global context. Thus they plead for a direct link between the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and the NIIO. Every nation should be able to dispose of its own information resources, elements

and channels, they argue (see also Nwosu, 1985; Pavlic, 1984; Renaud, 1984).

The Soviet-Russian or communist interpretation, though closely related to the version of the Non-Aligned Countries, nevertheless diverges from it concerning two essential issues. On the one hand, the link between the NIEO and the NIIO is not considered fundamental and consequently does not gets priority; on the other hand they hardly pay any attention to the structural forms of dependency and concentrate more on the ideological aspects and therefore on the content of the communication processes (Kolosov, 1984; Nordenstreng, 1984).

In my opinion there is also a fourth interpretation possible which starts from a bottom-up perspective in which the receiver is the starting point. White (1985:53-54) sums this up in six points: "(a) The communications media should serve the interests of all the public, not just the interests of the economically and politically powerful, whether the powerful be individuals, corporations or countries; (b) communication is not a proces of handing down in didactic fashion the knowledge of an elite, but rather a fostering of horizontal interchange and a mutual fashioning of culture among equals; (c) more decentralized communication systems are needed, allowing broader access to, participation in and use of these systems; (d) communication is a human right and communication systems should allow greater participation in their creation and

administration; (e) if the right to communication is basic, then education to use this right should be an integral part of all education; (f) the authoritarian models of communication need to be questioned and radically reformulated". This fourth perspective has been further elaborated in Servaes (1987a, 1987b).

By way of conclusion

This brief discussion of the so-called normative mediatheories in which I emphasized the importance of an interrelated examination of four dimensions, i.e. philosophical, political-economic and cultural, in a societal context based on power relationships leads to at least four conclusions of a general nature:

First, in one nation one can have different ownership and control structures on the one hand, and several philosophies with regard to the functioning of the media on the other hand.

Secondly, the above distinction can be expanded towards individual media structures. The press in a certain country can for instance be in private hands but still operate on a free press theory base; while the broadcasting system is run

by the government and uses and/or propagates more social-centralistic or social-liberal ideas.

Thirdly, this approach also provides a more appropriate methodology to analyse normative views on communication at the distinct local, regional, national as well as international levels of a given community.

And, finally, as power relationships are looked at in a multidirected and dialectic fashion, this approach does not limit itself to a top-down perspective only. This implies that also so-called participatory or user-oriented modes of communication can be explained and analysed from this perspective.

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